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# HOW WE 'BOMBED' TOKYO'S PRESS

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## Tokyo

Not all the casualties at the height of the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam after 1965 were Vietnamese. As American warplanes screamed low over North Vietnam, the U.S. Government and Ambassador to Japan, Edwin O. Reischauer, were dropping heavy payloads on the Japanese press, hoping thereby to change drastically a public opinion that was 90 per cent or more against Washington's war role.

Japanese public opinion was hardly affected. But the "bombing" made the tone of the Japanese press toward Washington considerably milder. Now a 400-page document, entitled *Writing on Stone*, and telling what happened from the time of the U.S. "escalation" against the Japanese press to the recent disclosure of the Pentagon Papers has been published in Japan with a first printing of 100,000 copies.

The author, Minoru Omori, a veteran of ten years' reporting in Washington and at the United Nations, was once *persona non grata* at the U.S. State Department. Why? Because he was the first non-Communist journalist to visit Hanoi after the intensified air raids began, and the first to report that U.S. warplanes, in broad daylight, were bombing civilian targets, including hospitals, schools and churches, and, incidentally, killing civilians. Omori's reports, carried on the front pages of *Mainichi Shinbun*, one of the world's largest dailies, created a sensation all over Japan—and offended the sensibilities of the State Department and Pentagon who kept maintaining that all U.S. bombing in the North was computerized and, thus, antiseptic.

As the bombings continued, U.S. officials commented tearfully that the Tokyo government was "perhaps better informed" than Japanese public opinion—"and that is why it is more understanding." (The words are Reischauer's.) The State Department responded by making the sweeping charge that the news rooms of *Asahi* and *Mainichi* were inundated by bearded Communists. But Reischauer, an authentic scholar from Harvard University, couldn't stomach that one. He praised the Japanese press "even when it criticizes American policy"; he lauded its "professionalism," "independence" and "integrity." Until, that is, Omori went to Hanoi and was followed by other Japanese journalists.

The biggest sore point was this: Omori reported that for ten consecutive days U.S. planes staged daylight raids on a leper hospital at Kin Lap, in the North; that the buildings bore Red Cross markings, and that many patients were killed or injured. The hospital itself was then inaccessible; but Omori and a colleague from *Asahi*, Shoryu Hatta (both were their papers' foreign editors), saw a documentary film of the bombing, then they

to be authentic because of the huge number of explosions in it. One scene showed a legless man being carried on another's back to an air raid shelter but being thrown to the ground by a bomb blast.

That same day Omori and Hatta saw with their own eyes destroyed hospitals and schools in cities closer to Hanoi than Kin Lap, and which, like Kin Lap, were miles from any military target. Seeing the terrible toll, Omori says in his new book, "It made us, people from a third nation, want to bury our heads in our hands."

An outraged Reischauer pounced on Omori, calling him a "poor newsman," a "biased reporter" and a "disqualified journalist." (Omori was the recipient of three international reporting prizes, two from the United States; a UCLA award and the UPI's Miles Vaughan distinguished reporting prize. Also, the Japan Publishers' Association had previously given him a prize for best reporting.) There was more: Omori and the *Mainichi* were blacklisted. When Omori tried to interview Secy. Dean Rusk, two "conditions" were demanded. First, the State Department wanted to read the report before it was published—in other words, pre-censorship. Second, the State Department wanted the whole front page reserved for Rusk with nothing else on it. Omori "agreed"—but only if the State Department paid his newspaper 20 million yen. The deal fell through.

But the 49-year-old editor suffered the brunt of U.S. pressure against the Japanese press. Reischauer's criticism was so scathing and State's pressure so great that Omori was forced to leave his newspaper. The Tokyo government, too, joined in the anti-press assault. Omori writes in his new book: "The result was that the Japanese press surrendered."

U.S. Sen. Mike Mansfield, the Senate Majority Leader, read Omori's reports in 1965 and endorsed the full report from Hanoi. Years later, the American Command in Saigon vindicated Omori. Also, as revealed in the Pentagon's secret history, the CIA gave supporting evidence about the high percentage—80 per cent—of civilian casualties from U.S. bombing in the North.

A former U.S. press chief in Saigon, Barry Zorthian, has suggested that the Japanese reports from North Vietnam were nearer the truth than the United States would have liked them to be. What were questionable were the statements about the air war in the North which the U.S. Government handed out to the press in Saigon, Washington and other capitals. Zorthian, a 47-year-old honor graduate from Yale, told the press in Saigon before leaving the post he had held for four years (1964-68): "I wish that we in Saigon had made it clearer that our air strikes in North Vietnam were not antiseptic, that sometimes [civilian] structures were hit by accident, rather than having the story come as a surprise from correspondents visiting Hanoi." Another remark by Zorthian is worth quoting. He said: "In past wars, American public opinion was favorably formed before the impact of the war hit. public

## **TIMES IS CRITICIZED ON PENTAGON PAPERS**

Leslie H. Gelb, coordinator of the Pentagon team that put together the secret study of the war in Vietnam, wrote in this week's Life magazine that he had "two serious criticisms" of The New York Times articles dealing with the study but that the articles "were largely a fair representation."

Mr. Gelb, writing in the issue dated Sept. 17, said that The Times "should have stated explicitly that President Johnson before the 1964 elections was not part of the general consensus in our Government to bomb North Vietnam." He said, "Our studies . . . depict him as quite resistant to this course."

The Times's articles, Mr. Gelb wrote, "give a misleading view of C.I.A. findings."

"While the C.I.A. was argu-

ing that the bombing of the North was having the opposite of the desired effects, as the Times revealed," he wrote, "it was not nearly as pessimistic about the war in the South."

The Pentagon papers, Mr. Gelb wrote, "have lessons to teach us about Vietnam and, more importantly, about how foreign policy is made in our nation—lessons which, I believe, are still unlearned."